

LONGEVITY AND THE POWER OF A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE



It's Never Too Late to Adopt Healthy Lifestyle Habits

The life expectancy of our nation's people has increased. Americans are living longer and in greater numbers, reflecting a demographic reality that will surge in the 21st century as the baby boom generation ages. While it once seemed that health problems are inevitable in older age, there is conclusive evidence that many diseases can, in fact, be controlled or, even better, prevented. Thus, it is almost never too late to adopt healthy lifestyle habits.

Positive changes in lifestyle have been shown to preserve function, delay or prevent the onset of disability, and improve the quality of life. The good news is that virtually all older people can reap health benefits if they:

- Improve their diet and nutrition;
- Maintain an appropriate weight;
- Stop smoking;
- Stick with regular physical activity and exercise;
- Get regular health checkups;
- Keep physically and mentally active and socially engaged.

According to the World Health Organization, health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over and improve their health. Disease prevention is the other side of the coin and includes measures to prevent the occurrence of disease -- such as risk factor reduction, to arrest its progress, and to reduce its consequences.

Even persons with chronic conditions, such as arthritis or diabetes, can benefit from healthy lifestyle changes. For example, some of the most common effects of these conditions can be delayed, reduced, or better controlled, resulting in better health, increased productivity, and an increased likelihood of successful aging. The ultimate goal of health promotion and disease prevention activities is to increase the quality and years of healthy life.

Prevention Agenda for the Nation

Healthy People 2010 is a national health promotion and disease prevention initiative to improve the health of all Americans, eliminate disparities in health, and improve the years and quality of healthy life. The Healthy People health promotion process began in 1979 with *Healthy People: The Surgeon General's Report on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention*, which was followed in 1990 by *Healthy People 2000*. *Healthy People 2010* represents the third time that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has developed 10-year health objectives for the nation. *Healthy People 2010* is a road map to better health to be used by states and communities, by professional organizations, by groups whose concern is a specific



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threat to health, or by a particular population group. *Healthy People 2010* contains broad-reaching national health goals for the new decade, focusing on two major themes - increasing the quality and years of healthy life, and eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in health status.

The Role of the Administration on Aging

The Administration on Aging (AoA) is the only federal agency dedicated to policy development, planning, and the delivery of supportive home and community-based services to our nation's diverse population of older persons and their caregivers. For three decades, we have worked to improve the well being of older Americans through Older Americans Act (OAA) programs in collaboration with other government agencies and private organizations.

The Network on Aging and Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Efforts

AoA's national network on aging promotes and implements preventive health measures and healthy lifestyles. Nutrition programs serve nutritious meals at group meal sites and deliver meals to a growing number of frail older adults who are homebound. Each of these meals provides one-third of the recommended dietary allowance and complies with American dietary guidelines. Congregate meal sites also offer participants the added benefits of nutrition screening, education, counseling and outreach. Services in congregate settings are designed to foster independence and/or enhance health and well being through improved nutrition and increased mental and social interaction. Deliveries of meals to homes are used as an opportunity to check on the health of the older person, as well as to provide some regular conversation and human contact. The OAA requires that meals programs offer nutritional education that encourage preventive health as well as treatment interventions, when necessary.

State Programs and Activities

State Units on Aging have helped older people maintain their independence through health promotion and disease prevention services. Funds allocated to the states are used to leverage other resources to increase public understanding of how healthy lifestyle choices reduce the risk of chronic health conditions in later years. All programs must, by law, be targeted to areas that are medically underserved and have large numbers of individuals with the greatest economic and social need for such services. Health promotion and disease prevention services help to ensure that older Americans are living longer, healthier lives.

Working in close partnership with its sister agencies in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the AoA provides leadership, technical assistance, and support to the national aging network of 57 State Units on Aging, 655 Area Agencies on Aging, 225 Tribal and Native organizations representing 300 American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal organizations, and two organizations serving Native Hawaiians, plus thousands of service providers, adult care centers, caregivers, and volunteers. For more information about the AoA, please contact:

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